

Erskine House
Main St. & Marine Way
Kodiak
Kodiak Island
Alaska

HABS No. AK-2

HABS
AK,
12-KODI,
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington DC 20240

ADDENDUM
12-19-77

Russian-American Company Magazin

HABS No. AK-2

Addendum to
Erskine House
101 Marine Way East
Kodiak
Kodiak Island
Alaska

HABS
AK,
12-KODI,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMPANY MAGAZIN

Addendum to
Erskine House

HABS
AK
12-KODI,
1-

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Location: 101 Marine Way East, Kodiak, Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Present Owner: City of Kodiak.

Present Use: Museum.

Significance: Possibly the oldest building in Alaska, the Russian-American Company Magazin was built by the Russians in Kodiak, their capital in Alaska between 1794 and 1808. This *magazin* (warehouse) might have been constructed as early as ca. 1808; the building was definitely standing at the time of the transfer to the United States, and is one of only three Russian buildings still extant in Alaska.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: The building's construction date is inconclusive; pending a more thorough architectural investigation, we are limited to graphic and documentary sources.

In the National Historic Landmark nomination, Barbara Smith reached the conclusion that the building was constructed sometime between 1804 and 1808. She pointed to Lisianskii's view of Kodiak in 1804-1805,¹ which showed no such building on this site. In 1808, Vasil'ev drew a plan of Kodiak that indicated a building on this site labeled "newly built magazin."

Voznesenskii's drawings from 1842-43 raise another possibility. His view looking west shows a two-story, gable-roofed building with two-story porch across it at the approximate site of this building. This building could have been built as something other than a warehouse, then converted to a warehouse by the time it was so identified on the 1868 map. The porch across the front is indicated on the 1868 map, which also shows the building as hip-roofed (although this may be a convention for detailing roofs). The two stories could have been reduced to one by the time of the first photographs; the framing of the roof appears to be more recent than the building. Also in Voznesenskii's view looking west, there is a one-story gable-dormered building southwest of the two-story one. Comparison with the 1868 map, though, shows that the location is wrong; the warehouse is opposite an indentation in the shoreline, not a nub. Thus the building could have been constructed by 1842-43 as a two-story, non-warehouse building, and subsequently altered.

¹See full citations of graphic material in part III, A, below.

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2. Architect: Not known. Built by the Russian-American Company.
3. Original and subsequent owners and uses:
 - 1808[?]-1867 Russian-American Company, for use as a *magazin*, or warehouse
 - 1868-1911 Alaska Commercial Company, for use as a warehouse and residence for manager (noted on map of 1868 as "warehouse")
 - 1911-1948 Wilbur J. Erskine, as his own residence
 - 1949-1964 Donnelly and Acheson Company, as rental housing
 - 1964-present City of Kodiak, for use as museum
4. Original plans and construction: Assuming the warehouse was built by 1808, it was a one-story log building, probably with a hipped roof and no dormer. By 1868 there was a porch across the front. If, on the other hand, the building was built by 1842, it was a two-story gable-roofed building with a two-story porch.
5. Alterations and additions: The most dramatic change to the building has been to its roof which, regardless of its original appearance, has been reconstructed. The front gable was added after construction (possibly in 1883, when other work was done on the building), as a portion of the shingled roof shows in the attic.

Other alterations concern additions to the building. A bay window on the west was added by ca. 1898-1900. A one-story extension on the northeast corner was apparently built in three stages, reaching completion by ca. 1893. It was reduced in size after the city acquired the building. The front porch was added by 1868 and partially glassed in 1942.

The exterior log walls may have been exposed originally, and then covered by board-and-batten siding by the Russians. The clapboard siding, said to be redwood, was added in 1883. The western door on the south front was moved from the second bay to the third by ca. 1893. The foundation was replaced with graywacke or slate beach slabs in 1940; that was replaced with concrete in 1978.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the west end of the building was altered to accommodate residents. A door was cut through the transverse log wall (previously there had been no interior access between these two major rooms), the western space subdivided into four rooms, and a beaded-board wainscot and wallpaper installed.

After the building was acquired by the city, the stove and chimneys were removed. Some partitions were removed (described in floor plans, below). Modern systems

of electricity, plumbing, heating, and a Halon fire-suppression system were installed.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building's sweeping gable roof and large gable dormer, while probably not original, give a distinctive appearance to this Russian log building, entirely in keeping with its historic character.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-and-a-half-story building measures approximately 66'-6" (eight-bay front) x 40'-2", with a 16'-0" x 14'-9" addition on the north end of the east side, a 5'-0" x 8'-2" bay window on the west side, and a porch across the south front.
2. Foundations: The foundations are concrete, covered by beaverboard.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with clapboards, painted white with green trim.
4. Structural system: The walls are constructed of horizontal logs, dovetailed at the corners. These were covered with vertical boards and battens and then painted or whitewashed. The battens were apparently removed when the clapboards were applied. The roof is formed of sawn lumber with no ridge pole.
5. Porches: The porch across the south front is one-story, shed-roofed, with chamfered posts. The western three bays (28'-3") are enclosed with clapboard walls approximately 3' high, and multi-paned glass above.
6. Chimneys: A stovepipe rises out of the addition on the northeast corner.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are two doors on the south front, both four-paneled with glass above.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The windows on the first floor have one-over-one-light double-hung sash set in plain frames. The dormer has six-over-six-light paired windows.

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8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roof is covered with wood shingles.
- b. Dormer: There is a large gable dormer in the front with paired windows and a wood-shingled roof. A small gable dormer in the rear has two-over-two-light windows and a wood-shingled roof.

B. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The interior is divided by a transverse log wall. To the west of it, partition walls indicated on the HABS drawings have been removed to create one large space. To the east of it, one adjacent partition has been removed; the kitchen and service rooms on the east end are as they appear on the drawings. On the second floor, a partition wall in the northwest corner, indicated on the HABS drawings, has been removed; all other partitions remain.
2. Stairways: There is a straight-run stairway near the eastern front door. It has moldings under each tread and turned wood balusters. The stairs to the attic are directly above.
3. Flooring: There is wall-to-wall carpeting on both floors, except for the kitchen, which has linoleum flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The log walls are exposed in the western room and three walls of the center room. The logs are squared, longitudinally grooved to fit snugly over the one below, and chinked with moss. To extend the logs' length, where necessary, they are square-notched. The other walls are covered with plasterboard; some walls have a wainscot of vertical beaded boards. The walls of the bay window are covered with horizontal beaded boards. The walls on the second floor are covered with horizontal tongue-and-groove boards.

The ceilings are covered with tongue-and-groove boards, with some traces of wallpaper. In the kitchen and service rooms, the ceilings are dropped. On the second floor, the ceiling is covered with beaded boards.

5. Doors: There are doorways but no doors between the western and center rooms. Other doors have five rectangular panels.
6. Mechanical equipment: The building is equipped with baseboard heat and fluorescent lights.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces southeast, but for simplicity in this report, and to conform with the HABS drawings, has been described as if it faced south. It looks toward the water and the ferry landing. The yard is supported by a stone retaining wall. There is a flagstone walk leading to the front porch. North of the house is a public park.
2. Historic landscape design: The 1808 map shows this building surrounded by others, including the church, the governor's house, workshops, and houses.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

- ca. 1794 View of Kodiak, looking northwest, from A. V. Efimov Atlas of Geographical Discoveries in Siberia and Northwest America, XVII-XVIII Centuries (Moscow, 1963). Printed in Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier, ed. Barbara Sweetland Smith and Redmond J. Barnett (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1990), 219.
- 1798 View of Kodiak, looking southeast, from Efimov Atlas. Printed in Svetlana Federova, The Russian Population in Alaska and California, Late 18th-Century to 1867 (trans. and ed. Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly; Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press, 1973), fig. 6. Also printed in Russia's American Colony, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 173.
- ca. 1804-05 View of Kodiak, looking north, from Iurii F. Lisianskii, A Voyage Around the World in 1803-06 (St. Petersburg, 1809-12). Printed in Smith and Barnett, 76, Federova, fig. 4, and Starr, 176.
- 1808 Plan of Kodiak by I. F. Vasil'ev. From Oregon Historical Society, ORHI 37371. Copy in NHL file. Also reprinted in Starr, 179.
- 1808 View of Kodiak, looking northwest, by I. F. Vasil'ev. Printed in Federova, fig. 7.
- 1808 View of Kodiak, looking northwest, from Georg H. von Langsdorff, Bemerkungen auf einer Reise um die Welt... (Frankfurt: F. Wilmans, 1812), facing p. 50. Printed in Starr, 178.
- 1826 Plan and view of Kodiak from Sarichef Atlas, Library of Congress. Although published in 1826, this view and plan differ little from the

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Vasil'ev view and plan of 1808.

- 1842-43 View of Kodiak, looking northeast, by Voznesenskii, Oregon Historical Society ORHI 26998. Printed in Oregon Historical Quarterly (June 1972), fig. 10.
- 1842-43 View of Kodiak, looking west, by Voznesenskii, Oregon Historical Society, ORHI 26999. Printed in Oregon Historical Quarterly (June 1972), fig. 11.
- 1868 Plan of Kodiak by U.S. Army. Edwin S. Curtis, 2nd Lieut., 2nd Artillery, "Military Reservation of Fort Kodiak." Xerox in NHL file.

Prints of the following photographs are included with the National Historic Landmark nomination:

- ca. 1875-90 Photograph looking northwest. Kodiak Historical Society, Capt. Palmer Roberts Collection, neg. no. P-335-22. NHL fig. 16.
- ca. 1875-90 Photograph looking west. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks, W. F. Erskine Collection, #70-28-411N. NHL fig. 17.
- ca. 1893 Photograph looking northwest. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks, W. F. Erskine Collection. NHL fig. 26.
- ca. 1898 Photograph looking northwest. Kodiak Historical Society, Slifer Collection, #70-167-17-9b. NHL fig. 19.
- ca. 1906 Photograph of north side of building, looking northeast, with women on horseback. Kodiak Historical Society. NHL fig. 18.

B. Bibliography:

Most of the information in this report was taken from Barbara Sweetland Smith, "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Russian-American Company Magazin (Storehouse)" (National Park Service, 1986). The National Historic Landmark file in the History Division also includes a report by John A. Hussey, Robert S. Luntz, and Ronald N. Mortimore, "Feasibility Report: Erskine House" (National Park Service, Western Regional Office, 1965).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Russian-American Company Magazin was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The

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project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1989 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; Jean Swearingen, curator; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.